

# YELLOWSTONE RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COUNCIL

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CONSERVATION DISTRICT MEMBERS: Carbon, Custer, Dawson, Park, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, Yellowstone, McKenzie County North Dakota, RAC Chairman

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## Meeting Minutes -- June 15, 2006

MSU-Billings College of Business – Room 163

**Members Present:** Paul Gilbert, Sweet Grass CD; Tony Barone, Richland CD; Don Youngbauer, Rosebud CD; Phil Fox, Treasure CD; Bob Hector, Yellowstone CD; Steve Story, Stillwater CD; Dave Schwarz, Prairie CD; Daryl Stutterheim, Park CD; Walter Rolf, Custer CD; Kenny Nemitz, Dawson CD; John Moorhouse, RAC Chairman and Orvin Finsaas, McKenzie ND, CD.

**Others Present:** Warren Kellogg, NRCS/TAC; Jim Robinson, DNRC; Rick Duncan, DNRC; Dale Vermillion, RAC; Gay Easton, Yellowstone CD; Laurie Zeller, DNRC; Pat Riley, DNRC; Susan Gilbertz, MSU-B; Karin Boyd, TAC/ Applied Geomorphology; Tony Thatcher, DTM; Boris Krizek, RAC; Jim Kraft, Yellowstone County; Arthur Gehmert, RAC; Barbara Berry, Stillwater CD Administrator; Penny Landon, Carbon CD Administrator; Coral Wilson, Sweet Grass CD Administrator; Laurie Kelly, Rosebud CD Administrator; Stacey Graham, Reberg's Office; Brent Esplin, Bureau of Reclamation; Liz Galli-Noble, MT. Water Center; Kelly Gilbertson, Project Assistant, and Carol Watts, Custer CD Administrator.

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Chairman Paul Gilbert called the meeting to order at 10:05 pm on Thursday, June 15, 2006. Introductions were made. Gilbert had invited the District Administrators to attend and asked that their Council members introduce them. Gilbert thanked the administrators for their hard work.

**TAC Update:** The Yellowstone TAC notes are attached. Warren Kellogg started the meeting with the TAC update saying that two studies were under way and he thanked the CD Administrators, Supervisors and RAC members who helped with making local contacts. Warren said that Susan Gilbertz would do the first presentation on the cultural interviews and Karin Boyd and Tony Thatcher would do one on geomorphology. Warren plans to speak about the Pryor Creek fish passage.

**Cultural Interviews:** Susan Gilbertz introduced her co-workers, Damon Hall and Cristi Horton. Susan explained that the study was split into 4 segments and each segment had 120 to 140 names. Two of these field trips are complete; Springdale to Laurel and Powder River to Missouri. Section one produced 486 pages of interviews and section two had 444 pages. Susan commented that once the people agreed to talk they did a lot of talking. Agricultural people spoke in terms of farming and ranching and expressed concern for conservation on the river. There is a strong desire to see something done to control erosion without trying to change the channel. Susan noted that the eastern end of the study was more open to recreationists than the western end. The main consensus was that Montanans do not like to be told what to do.

Susan presented a budget and said she was over budget now but hopes that by the end of the study she will be under budget. She will speak to the COE about transferring funds to equipment to balance the budget out.

Warren Kellogg responded to a question about the scope of Susan's work saying that this effort was just one task out of nine included in this scope of work. Warren also said the preliminary results from Susan's work have been exceeding his expectations.

Susan said that Dr. Tarla Rai Petersen from Texas A&M will be in Billings to provide a quality assurance check on the work that is done.

The next segment of their study is from the Big Horn to the Powder River. The last one, Yellowstone County will be completed after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. If anyone is aware of a person who should be included in the interviews they can still contact Susan. She will include them, even if it is by way of a phone interview.

**Pryor Creek Fish Passage:** One of the demonstration projects funded through DNRC on the Yellowstone River is a fish passage feasibility study on Pryor Creek. DNRC funding will be augmented with possible funding coming from the Bureau of Reclamation. Brent Esplin was on hand to explain BOR's role in doing the feasibility study. He said the first thing would be to do an onsite evaluation, determine alternatives and create a conceptual design with a cost estimate to bring back to the Council.

A letter of request for funding must be submitted by the Custer CD on behalf of the Council. A three way MOU between the BOR, DNRC, and CCCD will also need to be drafted and signed if the funding is approved. Paul Gilbert asked if there were any objections to proceeding with this and there were none. Approval was given by consensus vote.

Kellogg said that Danielle Jones of MSU-Bozeman came to the TAC meeting and gave a progress report. She reported that they began their studies May 31, 2006. There are two teams working in the field. They hope to finish their bird counts by early July. They will then do vegetative work through the month of July. The work will be completed by this fall and Danielle will be invited to a YRCDC meeting to give a report.

**Photography Acquisition:** Jim Robinson gave an explanation of the historical aerial photography that have been purchased and how they will be used. He also said that we will spend down the 2002 RDGP grant by acquiring additional photography. These photos help document temporal changes of the river and the biological characteristics in support of the cumulative effects assessment. They will also be used to show how the channels have changed over time in order to develop a human impacts timeline. These are included in the geomorphology scope of work. In addition the aerial photography will be used to support wetland and riparian vegetation time trend analysis. Robinson listed the photos that we have, and those that are on order.

**Geomorphology:** Karin Boyd and Tony Thatcher were on hand to talk about a proposed scope of work to identify segments of the channel based on inundation potential and channel migration potential of the Yellowstone River. At the last meeting approval was given for the TAC to present a scope of work in more detail with costs estimated. Much of the photography and mapping has already been generated. They will use a model already completed in the Big Hole Watershed. The state recommended that the inundation modeling results be adopted as the Big Hole's one hundred year floodplain boundary in lieu of doing detailed surveying. To meet traditional FEMA standards would cost about \$25,000 a mile, doing it this way is significantly less. Thatcher stated there is about 560 miles of the Yellowstone River from Gardner to the Confluence and the majority of it is largely rural. There is a need for cost effective tools for landowners to use in managing the river. Detailed flood maps do not exist for most of this area. This process will provide an inundation zone and a channel migration zone which will result in a composite river management model for the entire corridor. The cost will be approximately \$66,000.00 for the whole corridor.

Chairman Paul Gilbert commented that this was a lot of information for the amount of money spent. He asked the Council for their thoughts concerning this scope of work. The funding will come out of the 2005 RDGP grant. Approval to pursue this scope of work was granted by consensus vote. Decisions will need to be made on how to present this to the public once the information is ready.

**Interim Coordinator Update:** Dave Schwarz, Interim Coordinator said our efforts at getting the Council more recognition are coming about in Washington D.C. Heather Staphanik of Burn's office called for more information before briefing the energy and water subcommittee. Schwarz has spoken with Liz Ching and she said that next week the energy and water committee will be doing their mark ups so we should have an idea of what the funding will be in early July. WRDA (Water Resource Development Act) language has been inserted for recovery money for the Yellowstone River which matches the language of the Missouri River Study. This will make funding of our projects much easier.

Schwarz said that the Council made an application for an EPA wetlands grant. The Nature Conservancy is the sponsor for this grant which is for the wetlands scope of work in the project management plan. Greg Kudray of the Montana Heritage Center took the lead on writing this grant. The competition for this grant is strong and it is possible that the Yellowstone study may not be a perfect fit.

Schwarz is continuing to work with Liz Ching to keep the Yellowstone River on the radar screen. Phil Fox questioned whether we were dealing with the people who are running for office in the event that they get elected to office. Dave said he was not but it was a good point.

Schwarz said he is working on the 2006 Annual Report. Paul Gilbert mentioned that there were copies of the 2005 Annual Report at the back of the room. Laurie Zeller is to be commended for all the work she did on this report. This report was approved by consensus and Paul thanked all the people who had worked on it.

Paul Gilbert called attention to the letter from Conrad Burns that was in the Council member's packets. The letter states that he is still working on funding for the cumulative effects study on the Yellowstone River.

There are updated fact sheets available for Council members to take back to their districts.

A letter from a North Dakota Congressman was read by Kelly Gilbertson at Orvin Finsaas' request. The letter promises to keep the YRCDC in mind as the budgeting process continues.

John Moorhouse, RAC Chairman noted that Steve Story had resigned from the RAC. His letter of resignation stated that he was not able to dedicate the necessary time to serve on the Resource Advisory Committee.

**Business Meeting:** Treasurer's report was given by Carol Watts. The financial statement shows all the activity in the account since the last meeting and the grant statement shows where we are with the grants. The reports were approved and filed for audit. Carol requested that vouchers be turned in after the meeting so that the funds in the pass through grant would be spent before the first of July.

A discussion was held on the best way to spend any of the left over funds and the Council approved by consensus vote to purchase a laptop computer for the coordinator's use if funds are available.

Minutes of the April 20, 2006 teleconference were reviewed. John Moorhouse made a motion to approve the minutes. Don Youngbauer seconded the motion. There were no objections and the motion passed by voice vote.

**Discussion:** At this time Gilbert asked the Council if any of them had any problem with Dave Schwarz serving as the interim coordinator in addition to being a Council member. There were none. Gilbert then asked if Schwarz should receive the stipend for serving on the Council in addition to the coordinator's stipend. Laurie Zeller commented that if he was not serving as the coordinator at the meeting he could be paid the Council member's stipend. Gilbert said that Schwarz would continue as the Prairie CD representative and be paid a stipend. He will also serve as interim coordinator and be paid a stipend until a new coordinator is hired. Walter Rolf recommended that Schwarz furnish a report to Council members on his activities during the month. Schwarz said he would do that.

If needed, there will be a tele-conference in July. The meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Watts, CCCD Administrator

## **Yellowstone River Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Notes Billings, MT - 6/14/2006**

### **Corps 2007 Budget**

Dave Schwarz reported that the House Appropriations Committee has upped the President's recommended 2007 COE budget for the Yellowstone River from 200K to 250K. Nothing yet determined on the Senate side.

### **Hydrology/Hydraulics**

No report was provided by the COE on in-house progress with hydrology and hydraulic modeling.

USGS reports that they expect funding from the COE for the next round of bridge surveys in June. If funding is received as expected, they plan to be out by the end of June to complete the bridge surveys down to the mouth of the Big Horn River. Data would then be processed shortly after the field work is completed.

### **Projects**

*Cartersville Diversion/Fish Passage Feasibility:* Members of the TAC met with the Cartersville Irrigation Company last year to discuss alternatives to an existing diversion that would provide fish passage. There is a lot of attention being given to the Intake Diversion so there has not been any follow-up. It will be the TAC's recommendation that the YRCDC put the Cartersville effort on hold for now until the Intake project plays out in regards to technical feasibility, project costs, and whether the COE receives expanded authorization via WRDA legislation to use Missouri River restoration funds. Intake construction may be 3 to 4 years out. We would still proceed ahead with a detailed topographic survey of the Cartersville reach if the COE funding becomes available. In the meantime, the YRCDC will be encouraged to send a letter to the Cartersville Irrigation District and the Rosebud CD suggesting this approach. George Jordan will work with Dave Schwarz on a draft letter.

*Pryor Creek Fish Passage Feasibility:* The YRCDC has received \$10,000 from DNRC. There is a possibility of receiving an additional \$5,000 from the BOR through their Technical Assistance to States program. There would need to be a request from the YRCDC for this funding and eventually a Memo of Understanding. Brent Mefford (BOR) would be doing the conceptual alternatives and cost estimates if all the funding and contracting can be put into place.

### **Geomorphology**

1) Karin Boyd and Tony Thatcher reviewed the GIS tasks that DTM (Bozeman consulting firm) has been contracted to complete: Work Order #1: \$10,580. 98% completed.

- Integrate Park County data to make compatible with the data generated on the rest of the river: channel center lines and channel classification scheme. Meshing the Park County bank lines and physical features were not part of this contract.
- Scanned and georeferenced GLO maps for Park County. Digitized primary and secondary channel center lines.
- Create linear referencing indices for each of the primary channel centerlines from the 1950, 1976, 1995, and 2001 aerial photos.
- Adjusted existing study reach boundaries: minor shifts and orientation changes. Added 21 new reach breaks for Park County.
- Create valley reference center line which allows a calculation of channel sinuosity by reach.
- Study reach areas (polygons) created using a 5 mile buffer on both sides of the channel.
- Other channel geomorphic parameters calculated: channel length, braiding, river complexity index (RCI), channel displacement...

DTM will provide a written report by the end of June. A summary of this report will be put together by Jim Robinson and Karin Boyd to provide to the YRCDC at their next meeting.

2) Karin Boyd and Tony Thatcher reviewed the proposed scope of work that would define potential areas of flooding and bank migration hazards. The major tasks include:

- Development of a Channel Migration Zone (based on 50 years of historic channel change)
- Development of an Avulsion Potential Zone (50 years)
- Development of an Inundation Zone (approximate 100 year inundation zone)

This work would be part of the existing geomorphology scope of work. The total estimated cost is \$66,655.00, or approximately \$119/mile. The TAC feels that this work will provide a strong foundation for more detailed geomorphic work in the future.

### **Avian**

Danielle Jones (MSU-Bozeman) gave a report to the TAC on their progress doing the avian field work. They began their field work on May 31<sup>st</sup> using two teams. They expect to finish their bird counts by early July and will continue into the month doing vegetative characterization at each of their sites. They have done 275-300 surveys on approximately 75 different landowners. There have only been a few denials by those contacted.

### **Photo Acquisition**

Jim Robinson handed out a status sheet on acquired aerial photography for each study reach. The primary uses of these sets of photography will be to evaluate: channel changes over time, human impacts, wetland/riparian vegetative changes, and land use/land cover changes. This sheet will be handed out to the YRCDC members.

### **Socioeconomic – Cultural Values Interviews**

Susan Gilbertz and her team gave a report on their progress. They have completed interviews in two of the four segments: Springdale to Laurel & Powder River to the Confluence. They have identified 120-140 names per segment and have completed 91 interviews in two segments. Four interest groups are being interviewed: agriculture, recreation, small parcel owners, and government. The small parcel category is the most difficult. Next week they will begin on the Big Horn to Powder River segment.

### **Public Outreach**

It was suggested that the YRCDC host a series of landowner meetings this winter to present some of the preliminary results of the 2006 avian, cultural values, and riparian work and to go over field work scheduled for 2007.

### **TAC Meeting**

The next TAC meeting is tentatively schedule for August 16<sup>th</sup>.